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SUBJECT: WHITHER INKATHA FREEDOM PARTY

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) continued its decade-long demise in KwaZulu Natal (KZN) by losing the recent election to the ANC. An anachronistic leader, a tough ANC opponent, a shift in KZN traditional leadership, and a poor track record of service delivery worked against the IFP. The IFP may yet hold on to power by replacing its current leadership and focusing on service delivery. End Summary.

Snapshot of IFP's Rule in KZN

¶2. (SBU) The IFP has a long history of governance in KZN, beginning in 1970 when it governed the former KwaZulu homeland. Post apartheid, it governed KZN for 10 years from 1994 to 2004, but the IFP has seen its power decline with each subsequent election. In 1994, the IFP received 50.3 percent of the KZN vote, in 1999, 41.9 percent, and in 2004, 36.8 percent. In the most recent election, the IFP won only 22.4 percent of the votes in its former stronghold. This is a great loss for the IFP. It means that it has lost five of the nine wards it previously controlled and will see its number of seats in the provincial legislature drop from 30 to 18.

¶3. (SBU) After the first two elections, the IFP formed a coalition government with the ANC that endured even after the ANC won control of KZN in 2004. This coalition came to an abrupt end when ANC Premier Sibusiso Ndebele fired all IFP ministers in November 2006 after the IFP formed a coalition against the ANC in northern KZN. Since then, the ANC has governed the province without the IFP, and relations have soured between the parties. Final election results show that the ANC made significant inroads throughout KwaZulu-Natal, including traditional IFP strongholds such as Zululand and Northern KZN. Based on these results, local political analysts such as Protas Madlala have concluded that the once influential IFP has been 'obliterated' as a political force.

Why the IFP Lost:
-Leadership

¶4. (SBU) The IFP pinned its hopes on a man who is well liked but is not seen by KZN voters as a hope for the future. Since he founded the IFP, Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi has been the face and soul of his party, so much so that he has not allowed for the development of other leaders within the party. Voters see the party as a one-man show and wonder what the IFP has left to offer as Buthelezi journeys into his eighties. For some, Buthelezi and his party are a painful reminder of KZN's violent political past, while others even blame the deaths of thousands on the IFP's former alignment with the apartheid regime during the early 1990s.

15. Younger forces within the IFP seem poised to demand new leadership. KZN-based newspaper The Mercury reported on April 30 that many within the IFP Youth Brigade have called for Buthelezi to step down in light of the recent defeat at the polls. Although officially denied by the IFP Youth League (IFPYL), former IFPYL President, Thulasizwe Buthelezi (no relation to Prince Buthelezi), reported to Pol/Econ Assistant that many IFPYL members are concerned about the party's future and are indeed eager for a change of leadership.

-Formidable ANC Opponent

16. (SBU) The IFP had a tough opponent in the ANC. The ANC in KZN managed its internal differences well and after the Polokwane leadership nomination process, opted to retain Mbeki-appointed leaders in KZN and avoid potentially damaging in-fighting. The ANC also had strong election organization and mobilization throughout the province and spent approximately R60, 000,000 (\$7,000,000) on its KZN campaign effort, reported ANC parliamentarian Chris Mlotsha to Pol/Econ Assistant.

-Zulu Pride

17. (SBU) For many Zulus in KZN, the prospect of a Zulu president who is from Zululand was reason enough to abandon the IFP and vote for the ANC. Jacob Zuma is the first non-Xhosa and Zulu leader of the ANC since Albert Luthuli in 1967. Historically, the IFP is known for Zulu nationalism, but the ANC eroded much of the IFP base by pushing the idea that its candidate stood a better chance of winning and would be the first Zulu to rule South Africa since Shaka.

-Traditional Leadership

18. (SBU) Traditional leaders in KZN still wield a great deal of political influence and, historically, the IFP could always

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count on the support of these leaders. Although the IFP made some improvements to the lives of traditional leaders during its rule, it took their support for granted. The ANC, on the other hand, was strategic in currying favor with traditional leaders. For example, since it took control of KZN in 2004, the ANC provided free medical insurance and new housing to all traditional leaders, and increased their salaries by about 70 percent. Also, because of the ANC, members of the House of Traditional Leaders are now elected by peers rather than appointed, as was the practice under the IFP. More recently, the ANC began providing stipends to the influential headmen of traditional leaders. In the end, the ANC was rewarded with an outright electoral victory.

-Service Delivery

19. (SBU) One of the biggest factors in IFP's defeat, however, is the successful delivery of public services under the ANC. Although the IFP relentlessly harped on the issue of poor service delivery in KZN, the ANC has actually managed in five years of rule to deliver development to the province in ways the IFP did not during its tenure. Since the ANC took control of KZN, roads have improved significantly in rural and peri-urban areas, many rural towns and villages have been electrified, clinics have been established, and sanitation and access to water has greatly improved. While residents still expect more improvements, the IFP could not convince voters that a switch away from the ANC would lead to continued development. In contrast, the IFP has struggled to get many of its councilors to deliver basic services at the municipal level -- a fact that Buthelezi painfully acknowledged in his concession speech.

-Other Mistakes

110. (SBU) The IFP also made other tactical mistakes that cost it votes at the polls. For example, the party nominated the inexperienced Zanele kaMagwaza Msibi as the IFP's KZN premier candidate. She could not compete against ANC candidate Zweli

Mkhize (former KZN Finance Minister and soon-to-be KZN Premier), whose popularity and outstanding track record in government could not be denied. The IFP did not effectively lure young swing voters whose allegiance is still being determined. Also, the IFP did not take seriously the possibility that it might lose votes to upstart party Congress of the People (COPE).

Comment

¶11. (SBU) IFP leaders have declared that the party is still a force to be reckoned with but have not offered any specifics on how it will regroup. What is clear, however, is that the IFP must move beyond the personality of its 80-year-old leader, Buthelezi, and focus on service delivery in its remaining local strongholds. KZN-based newspaper The Witness reported the story of a defaced Buthelezi poster in Cape Town which read in Xhosa, 'Dedela banye, suba uMugabe,' (Give others a chance, don't be another Mugabe). This sentiment captures accurately the reality that Buthelezi no longer offers his party a vision for the future, and, if he continues on as leader, will drive the party to extinction. Buthelezi denied media reports that he has been offered a cabinet position in Zuma's administration, but when asked by Pol/Econ Assistant if he would consider such an offer, Buthelezi said that it would be up to the party.

¶12. (SBU) If the IFP is to establish a strong record of service delivery, it must effectively address the non-performance of its own councilors. Buthelezi admitted in his concession speech that his party failed to correct the errant behavior of its councilors. While corruption may play a role in this problem, it is more likely that IFP councilors simply lack the management capacity to make good on its promises. In the past, the IFP has not mustered the will to fire its faithful councilors; but this time around, supporters will likely demand that the party fill its ranks with competent workers.

¶13. (SBU) As the ANC's development agenda continues to focus on urban issues, however, taking up the cause of the forgotten rural populace may yet keep the IFP from complete annihilation. While the ANC campaigned vigorously in rural areas and promised to make rural development a priority, it remains to be seen if rural concerns such as land redistribution, and access to basic public services and health care will become priorities for the ANC.

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